

Topic: **How Can School Wellness Policies Support Farm to School Programs?**



Photo courtesy of Krista Garand

"If the requirement is written into the policy, then people can't get away with not doing it."

- Jenny Pritchard

Farm to school programs seek to educate students on a range of topics, including nutrition. Schools with wellness policies in place that emphasize nutrition are at a natural advantage when it comes to implementing farm to school programs. Jenny Pritchard, Health Education Coordinator for the Durango School District 9-R, played a key role in implementing the [school wellness policy action plan](#), which supports the district's farm to school efforts. The policy was finalized in June of 2006 by a committee representing each of the eight Coordinated School Health (CSH) components, which Jenny serves on. The CSH model has eight components of health: health education, physical education, family/community involvement, health services, nutrition services, healthy and safe school environment, counseling/psychological and social services, and health promotion. One resource the committee referenced to create the policy was the Center for Ecoliteracy's [Model Wellness Policy Guide](#). This guide provides language and recommendations to assist schools

in generating comprehensive wellness policies. Durango District 9-R's wellness policy is structured into two parts: overarching district policy that provides general guidelines and the wellness policy action plan. The wellness policy action plan provides detailed guidelines in the form of a rubric in the areas of nutrition, health and nutrition education, and physical activity.

How is the Durango District 9-R Wellness Policy implemented?

The Durango District Health and Safety Committee oversees the implementation of the wellness policy at an indirect level by addressing issues that emerge district-wide. The Durango School District 9-R also has a wellness team in each



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school that is assigned school-specific tasks to implement to promote wellness and uphold the policy based on individualized school needs. Krista Garand, Director of Student Nutrition and District Health and Safety Committee member, adds that vocal, health-minded parents in the district have provided invaluable support in promoting implementation, stating “They are



Photo courtesy of Lisa Wilk

really concerned about their kids, and they want to make sure that we are keeping their health in mind when making policy decisions.”

How does the policy address local foods?

Jim Dyer of [Healthy Community Food Systems](#) was integral to ensuring Durango’s wellness policy included a preference for local foods. Dyer, a farmer and member of the [Colorado Farm to School Task Force](#), actively works to connect local farmers to school nutrition directors. The wellness policy action plan specifically states that “... it is strongly encouraged that district staff work with local farmers to provide local produce and other locally produced foods at the school sites.” Presently the wording only recommends rather than requires purchasing local food, so Garand urges schools in the prelimi-

nary stages of developing wellness policies to “... definitely put it as a requirement!”

How does the wellness policy influence the farm to school program?

The Durango wellness policy supports farm to school efforts across the district in the cafeteria, the classroom, and the farms. Local food in the cafeterias, nutrition education in school gardens, and classroom visits from farmers are a few ways that Durango School District 9-R leverages its wellness policy to bolster the farm to school program. The development of the wellness policy bolstered farm to school support because those same committee members advocating for a local food clause in the policy were also strong supporters of the farm to school movement. Now, Durango has one of the most successful farm to school programs in the state, with the dedicated food service director allocating about 7% of the budget to local food.

What makes a strong wellness policy?

When considering strategies to improve the Durango wellness policy, ideally, Pritchard would like a more stringent local food requirement, such as mandating that a minimum of 25% of all food purchased be locally grown. Pritchard views policy change as crucial to program sustainability, noting that “Having strong language that requires local food sourcing would make our farm to school program sustainable. Right now, it is Krista’s [Garand] dedication that is keeping the program strong, rather than any requirement or policy.” Pritchard and Garand plan to work with the District Health and Safety Committee to develop research-based policy revisions to present to the committee during the next round of Durango wellness policy revisions. Proposal adoption will be directly influenced by the Director of Finance, as the change is mostly a financial decision: does Durango have the

budget to support buying 25% local food for all schools? Pritchard notes, “If the requirement is written into the policy, then people can’t get away with not doing it.”

Pritchard and Garand both suggest several components that should be covered in a wellness policy that will affect farm to school efforts. Implementing local food into the wellness policy should be based on a reasonable requirement, rather than a suggestion or impractical goal. Another important step in creating and using a wellness policy is getting everyone to read the policy and be aware of it. This can be a challenge, Pritchard warns, but understanding the policy is crucial to instigating stakeholder change. Districts should draw from model wellness policies to craft specific farm to school language. Most importantly, Garand states, “It takes a champion that is passionate and committed to the program to really accomplish something like we have. The leader should be dedicated to making it [farm to school] happen, and willing to put in extra work.” ■

Resources

School Food Resource Toolbox

LiveWell Colorado

<https://about.livewellcolorado.org/livewell-toolbox/k-12-schools/school-food>

Learn about LiveWell Colorado’s Freshen-Up School Food Initiative to improve school food and find helpful tools, programs, and research.

Colorado Farm to School

<http://coloradofarmtoschool.org/>

Find numerous resources and models to improve and expand Farm to School activities in your district.

Sample Policies

Colorado Legacy Foundation

<http://colegacy.org/tool-and-resources/sample-policies/>

The Colorado Legacy Foundation provides several sample school wellness policies that incorporate health education, nutrition, physical activity, school health services and workplace wellness in a comprehensive policy.

School Wellness Policy

Denver Public Schools (DPS)

<http://www.dpsk12.org/policies/Policy.aspx?-db=policy.fp3&-format=detail.html&-lay=policyview&-sortfield=File&-max=50&-recid=33132&-findall=>

The school wellness policy for DPS was developed by Food & Nutrition Services, the Denver School Health Advisory Council, the Commission on School Nutrition and Physical Activity, parents, nurses, principals, teachers, students and community members

Wellness Policy Tool

Action for Healthy Kids

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/for-schools/wellness-policy-tool/>

This helpful tool allows users to post all provisions of their wellness policy, then note progress, next steps, resources needed, and people responsible for each. The tool also provides links to helpful resources based on areas needing improvement.

School Wellness Policy Tool Kit

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/nutriWellnessGuide.htm>

Compiled by the CDE, this toolkit offers step-by-step instructions for implementation of local school wellness policies.

Coordinated School Health

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/cshp/>

Coordinated school health (CSH) is recommended by CDC as a strategy for improving students' health and learning in our nation's schools. The website provides a model framework for planning and implementing CSH and offers resources to help schools, districts, and states improve their school health programs.

Farm to School Wellness Policies

Healthy Community Food Systems

<http://healthycommunityfoodsystems.org/>

The Farm to School group worked specifically with multiple school districts and suggested provisions regarding the inclusion of farm to school programs and guidelines in their wellness policies.